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ABSTRACT

Grounded in an in-depth study of the politics and practice of a single curriculum, "Facing History and Ourselves" (FHAO), this book integrates a close-up look at the classroom with a broader discussion of educational theory and policy. Study of the daily practice of the FHAO curriculum in a multiracial alternative and urban middle school in Cambridge (Massachusetts) is a lens on the politics and practice of curricula to foster critical moral thinking and social responsibility. This program was the subject of controversy in the 1980s when members of the political right argued that the disturbing subject matter dealing with the Holocaust caused students psychological harm. However, the book contends that the process of grappling with Holocaust history helps children to understand contemporary conflicts over diversity, multiculturalism, and social responsibility. A second lens focuses on educational policy by describing how FHAO and related educational programs fared in the Reagan era, when the New Right had heightened political influence. The widest lens provides a historical and explicitly political perspective by locating these issues in American discourse overall. It is argued that promoting the critical moral thinking of students is a vital responsibility of today's schools regardless of the bitter disagreement between American Left and Right. (SLD)

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